

Testimony of Abigail St. Lawrence, Montana Association of Churches

Proponent of SB 198

Testimony to House Judiciary Committee

March 12, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you on the vital issue of child abuse in Montana. The Montana Association of Churches ("MAC") represents over 180,000 Montanans and over 580 individual churches throughout the state in eight Christian denominations: the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the American Baptist Church. One of MAC's top legislative priorities is supporting children and strengthening families. In particular, MAC believes that children should be granted special protections under the law to protect their normal and healthy physical, spiritual, mental, moral, and social development. Very little threatens children's development more than child abuse, which is why we need to address such abuse with serious punishment, as well as effective prevention.

Even during the first two months of this year, numerous heinous examples of violence and harm against our littlest Montanans have been splashed across the state's newspapers with heartbreaking frequency. Regardless of party, we can all agree that even one news story like this is one story too many. However, these recent examples highlight the need to communicate through our laws that we do not tolerate abuse of young children in Montana.

The laws we enact are a statement of our values as a society. Passing SB 198 is a statement that we value our children in Montana and take seriously harm to them. Please recommend a "do concur" on SB 198 to show our children that they are valued and we take their protection seriously.